

GARFIELD PARK

HABS NO. DC-674

(Reservation No. 17)

Bounded by Virginia Avenue, the Southeast-Southwest
Freeway, E and F streets, South Carolina Avenue,
New Jersey Avenue and First and Third streets, SE
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS
DC
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HABS
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GARFIELD PARK (Reservation Number 17)

HABS No. DC-674

Location: Bounded on the south by Virginia Avenue and the Southeast-Southwest Freeway, on the north by E and F streets and South Carolina Avenue, on the west by New Jersey Avenue and on the east by First and Third streets, SE.

Owner/Manager: U.S. government; District of Columbia Parks and Recreation Department.

Present Use: Park, athletic area, and playground.

Significance: L'Enfant indicated this reservation as a huge open space on his plan. Unlike most of the parks at intersections, which were acquired as part of the street system, this parcel was purchased by the federal government. Originally much larger, the reservation has been eroded by railroads, freeways, and the congressional power plant.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of plan: 1791, L'Enfant Plan; 1792, Ellicott Plan.
2. Original and subsequent owners: This park was purchased by the U.S. government from Daniel Carroll in 1792.
3. First improvement: Although some sources report that it was improved in the 1830s, it was described as "vacant and unimproved" in 1872. In 1883, \$20,000 was requested to improve the reservation, and work probably ensued within the following few years.
4. Alterations and additions:
 - 1886: Roadway entrance on Second and F streets paved with cobblestone. Surrounding sidewalks paved with brick.
 - 1904: Frame tool house, workshop, and office room erected at the northeast corner. Large public sewer laid beneath the park with temporary sheds constructed for storage.
 - 1905: More than six acres in the western portion of the park lying between Virginia and New Jersey avenues and South Capitol Street approved as the site for a heating, lighting and power plant for the Capitol. Post-and-chain fence erected around portion of park bounded by New Jersey Avenue and First Street.
 - 1913: Park redesigned, new lights introduced.
 - 1916: New lodge erected.
 - 1969: 95,470 square feet transferred to jurisdiction of the District of Columbia for the Southeast/Southwest Freeway.

1972: Remaining 7.12 acres transferred to the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia.

B. Historical Context:

Much of the area now designated as Garfield Park was included in a large, irregularly shaped open space on Pierre L'Enfant's original plan of the city. L'Enfant probably selected the site for public acquisition because it contained several natural springs. Directly south of the Capitol Grounds, he indicated this area as a site for a grand cascade. Three avenues--Virginia, South Carolina and New Jersey--were planned to converge here, and the canal, which was to run along its western border, divided into two branches just south of the park.

Ellicott enlarged this open space on his plan and extended North Carolina Avenue south several blocks so that it, too, would radiate from the park. This space was included among the original seventeen appropriations purchased by the federal government for public use. Designated as Reservation No. 17, or Town House Square, it is one of the only parks that retains its original reservation number. Although one account claims that the park was graded in 1838 and used as a nursery for trees to embellish other city streets and parks, the space appears entirely unimproved on the Boschke map of 1857-61.¹ A diagram of the reservation in an 1876 real estate atlas shows it still unimproved, with New Jersey and Virginia avenues continuing through it. A branch of the canal ran along the southwest side of the reservation, and one of the city's most elegant residences Daniel Carroll's Duddington, faced the park from the north. Built in 1793 with bricks from Carroll's nearby brickyard, the grand estate encompassed all of City Square No. 736 between First and Second streets until it was razed in 1886 to make way for rowhouses.

As early as 1850, citizens of the vicinity petitioned Congress to fund improvements to the large open common. The portion of the park directly south of Duddington, between New Jersey Avenue and Second Street had a large supply of rock that supplied gravel to pave the city streets. The excavations in the park throughout the mid 1800s left large holes that created an "intolerable nuisance."² Commissioner of Public Buildings Ignatius Mudd recommended that this segment of the park be graded and planted with trees and its "copious springs" protected; improvement to the other parts of the park, however, were to be delayed "until the neighborhood becomes more populous, or at least until the streets adjacent are opened and graded."³

After the Civil War, Reservation No. 17 was earmarked as the site for the new city jail. The old jail in Judiciary Square was outdated and overcrowded, and many believed that such a facility should be located toward the city outskirts, rather than at the center of the bustling commercial core. The new jail was ultimately erected in an even more remote region, at its present site near the banks of the Anacostia River and in the 1880s the Office of Public Buildings and

¹ "Garfield Park, now one of the most beautiful parks in the city, was graded and to some extent improved in 1838 in connection with its use as a nursery for trees to ornament the public grounds and Pennsylvania Avenue." (Caemmerer, 225).

² Mudd, 12.

³ Mudd, 12.

Grounds (OPB&G), began to oversee the embellishment of Reservation No. 17. Since several roadways had been paved through the park, the first goal was to restore that land to the reservation. In 1883, OPB&G Col. A. F. Rockwell wrote:

New Jersey Avenue, which cuts through this reservation, was paved with granite blocks some years since by the District authorities. As the plan for the improvement of Reservation 17 provides for the incorporation in it of that portion of this avenue which traverses the grounds, the District Commissioners were granted permission, upon application, to take up and remove for use in District improvements such number of the granite blocks as they might wish, and some 38,000 blocks were accordingly so removed by them during the months of September and October last.⁴

Rockwell also requested \$20,000 to complete the improvements, writing: "It is designed to make this park one of the principal resorts of the city, with extensive roadways for carriage drives and walks conveniently located for pedestrian passage."

Although the OPB&G report stated the park was "located in a section of the city which, up to this date, has not been highly improved by private enterprise," by 1887 a total of \$78,500 had been expended to improve the park, and the eastern section was nearly complete. Planted with more than 2,000 deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs, it was said to contain "some of the handsomest specimens in the public grounds."⁵ With a newly improved park in place, the area began to develop in the ensuing decades. The Navy Yard, U.S. Marine Barracks and waterfront attracted middle- and working-class residents to the neighborhood. By 1901, the school-age population necessitated the construction of the Josiah Dent public elementary school adjacent to the park at South Carolina Avenue and Second Street.

Although the OPB&G diligently attempted to maintain the area as a large park, its efforts were constantly thwarted. Between 1886-92 OPB&G landscapers planted 6,500 trees in the park, laid paths along the lines of travel, and assigned both a night and day watchman to protect and maintain the property. Because of its location just north of the waterfront and Navy Yard and its proximity to the railroad tracks along Virginia Avenue, the park suffered from constant wear and tear from nearby construction and industry. In the 1880s, the chief officer complained that one of the gravel roads leading through the park to Virginia Avenue was regularly used by heavy teams and continually needed repair. In 1892, the park was further damaged when the Grand Army of the Republic camped there during its twenty-sixth annual reunion and erected temporary barracks and a mess hall.

Beginning in 1903, the 24-acre park was pared away little by little through a series of land transfers. That year, the portion of the park south of Virginia Avenue was granted by Congress to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. The Railroad Company erected an 8'-tall board fence to partition its land from the park in preparation for construction. The change of grades caused by the impending railroad construction required that the park be laid out anew. The OPB&G

⁴ Annual Report . . ., 1884, 2344.

⁵ Annual Report . . ., 1887, 2576.

commissioner wrote:

It will have to be graded up to conform to the new grades of streets crossing it, trees taken out and new ones planted, and new park roads and walks constructed. This work can not all very well be done until the railroad operations are concluded, but by doing some of the work the park might be used as a spoil bank and all the filling accomplished without cost. By taking advantage of circumstances great economy will result. It is therefore recommended that an appropriation of \$2,000 for Garfield Park be made for work required in it incident to the Pennsylvania Railroad operations.⁶

Because of the grant to the railroad, the park lodge at the intersection of Virginia and New Jersey avenues had to be removed, and a new tool house was erected in the northeast corner of the park. Coincident with these changes, the District government constructed a sewer through the center of the park, necessitating further excavation in the recently refurbished park. Furthermore, the contractors involved in the work constructed temporary storage structures in the park.⁷

In 1905 Congress approved the transfer of more than six acres between New Jersey Avenue and South Capitol Street to be used as the site for a new building for heating, lighting, and a power plant for the Capitol. The cast-iron posts from the post-and-chain fence erected that year around portion of park bounded by New Jersey Avenue and First Street remain in place today.

Despite these intrusions, local citizens flocked to the park for rest and recreation throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. A landscape plan installed at this time included a large elliptical area at the east end referred to as a "concert common," where weekly band concerts were given during the summer months. The park also offered facilities for tennis, basketball, croquet, quoits, and volleyball and featured sandboxes and wading pools for children. A 1,026-square-foot lodge erected in 1916 provided toilets for visitors and a 556-square-foot playground house was used for organized recreation by neighborhood children. An 163-square-foot metal garage was also erected for storage of maintenance equipment. All these facilities were located within the 9.3 acres that remained in what was originally a 24-acre parcel. The park has remained largely intact since this period with many of the original trees, paths, Washington Globe light fixtures, remnants of the post-and-chain fence along New Jersey Avenue, and the 1916 lodge house.

The park was reduced in size once again in 1969 when 95,470 square feet on the south side were transferred to jurisdiction of the District of Columbia for the construction of the Southeast/Southwest Freeway. The elevated, high-speed expressway was built above this section of the park; basketball courts were installed beneath the freeway in an attempt to mitigate the loss of parkland. Also at this point, Second Street, which had always continued through the park, was closed to traffic and its roadbed broken up and sodding put down in its place.

Currently the 7.12-acre park is managed by the D.C. Department of Recreation and features sport facilities and a playground. The narrow

⁶ Annual Report . . ., 1903, 2546.

⁷ Annual Report . . ., 1904, 3933.

northwestern section is the site of a day-care center for the House of Representatives. Due to the decrease in school-age children in the neighborhood, in the 1940s the Dent School was converted into a maintenance shop for the D.C. Public School System. In 1980, it reverted to its original function, as the Capitol Hill Day School.⁸ The children from the school and the day-care center continue to use the park as a playground.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Overall dimensions: The park covers 310,305 square feet, or 7.12 acres.
- B. Materials:
 - 1. Pathways, paving: The paths in the east section of the park run largely along the same lines as when they were first laid in 1913. The portion west of Second Street features brick perimeter walks and semicircular paths that lead into the center of the space. The two paved areas encircled by stone walls also remain in the south side of this portion of the reservation. Only a portion of the large elliptical "concert common" in the segment east of Second Street remains since a wide swath in the south side was lost to the Southeast/Southwest Freeway in 1969.
 - 2. Vegetation: The large panels throughout the park are sodded and planted with mature shade trees and shrubs.
 - 3. Structures:
 - a. Fences, gates, retaining walls: Remnants of original OPB&G cast-iron post-and-chain fencing are extant parallel to New Jersey Avenue. The rustic stone walls built around circular patios on the south side of the park also remain. One of the children's play areas is enclosed by a modern metal fence.
 - b. Benches: Metal-frame wood-slat benches are sparsely arranged around the circular paved areas and along the paths.
 - c. Lighting: Several Washington Globe Standard lamps, probably the same ones erected in 1913, remain in the park.
 - 4. Buildings: The 1916 frame lodge remains on the east side of the park.
 - 5. Recreation facilities: Two tennis courts are located in the southeast section, and children's play equipment are arranged in the center of the park.
- C. Site:
 - 1. Character of surrounding structures: The streets north and east of the park are lined with three-story rowhouses. The elevated Southeast/Southwest

⁸ Lee, 69.

Freeway hovers over the south side of the park, which is bounded by Virginia Avenue and the railroad tracks. New Jersey Avenue, elevated above the railroad tracks, marks the west side of the park.

2. Traffic patterns: Two-way, two-lane low-speed local traffic travels on the roads along the northeast and west sides of the park. On the south side is the raised Southeast/Southwest Freeway. Part of the park is underneath the high-speed eight-lane freeway.
3. Vistas: In its original state, this park would have afforded views of the U.S. Capitol dome up New Jersey Avenue, but the vista was eliminated when the park was reduced to its current size.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

Boschke, A. "Topographical Map of the District of Columbia surveyed in the years '57, '58, and '59."

District of Columbia Board of Public Works. "Exhibit Chart of Improved Street and Avenues." 1872.

Ellicott, Andrew. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1792.

L'Enfant, Pierre Charles. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1791.

Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Plan of the City of Washington, District of Columbia, showing the Public Reservations." Prepared by Orville E. Babcock. 1871.

Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations Under Control of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds." 1884, 1887, and 1894.

- #### B. Park plans: See Supplemental Information below for a list of attached plans. Additional plans are located at the Office of Land Use, National Capital Region.

C. Early Views:

1927: Survey photograph (NPS Reservation Files).

D. Bibliography:

Annual Reports of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1867-1933.

Caemmerer, H. P. Washington: The National Capital. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1932.

"Government Reservations within the City Boundaries," City Lots, Real Estate

Atlas (NARA RG42 230).

Lee, Antoinette J. "Public School Buildings of the District of Columbia, 1804-1930." Unpublished manuscript. 1989.

Record Group 42, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA RG42).

Reservation Files, National Capital Region, National Park Service.

U.S. Congress, House, "Letter from the Commissioner of Public Buildings transmitting his Annual Report for 1850." Ignatius Mudd, 31st Cong., 2nd sess. Ex. Doc. No. 47. 1851.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold
Project Historian
National Park Service
1993

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

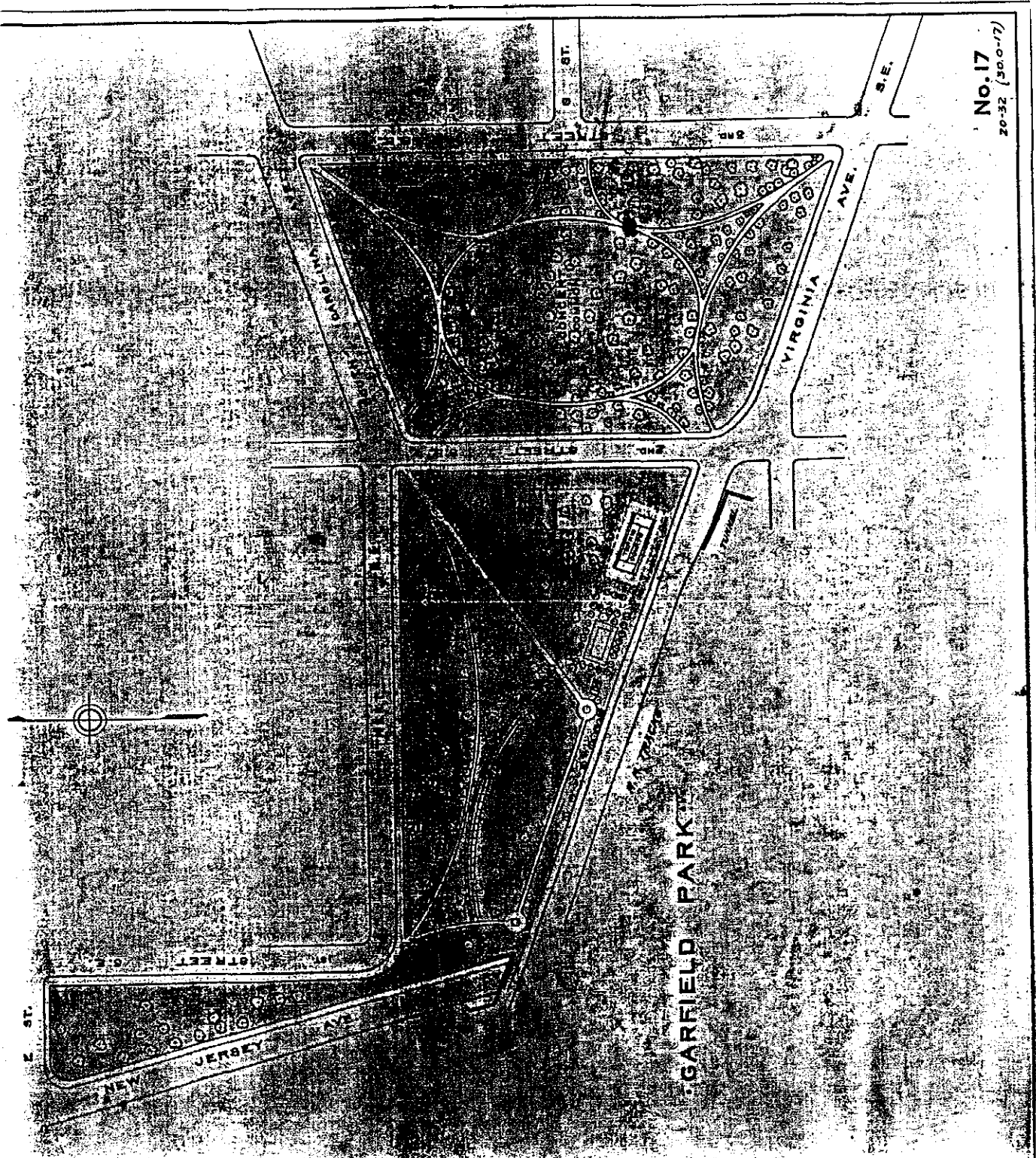
The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990-93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic Preservation Division, District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which provided Historic Preservation Fund monies; the National Capital Region and its White House Liaison office, NPS; and the National Park Foundation Inc.

HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.

PART V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

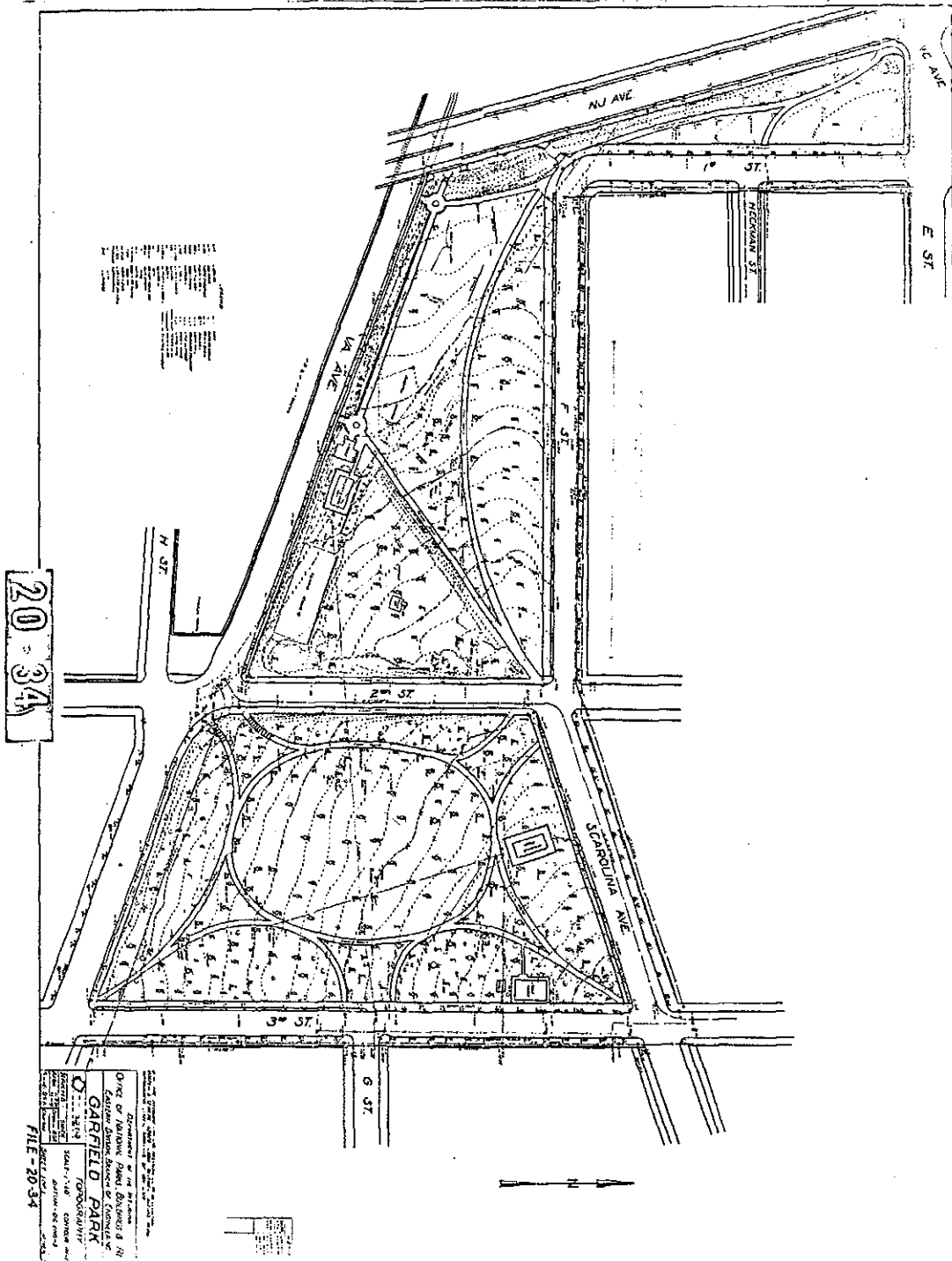
Page 8	1876:	Diagram showing park dimensions (<u>City Lots</u> , NARA RG42 230).
Page 9	ca 1920:	Park plan showing locations of trees, paths and park facilities (NPS Reservation Files).
Page 10	1924:	Park plan and survey showing dimensions of park, path layouts and athletic facilities, with accompanying list of features such as fencing, plantings and buildings (NPS Reservation Files).
Page 11	1934:	Park plan showing topography, locations and types of trees, walks, and other park features (NPS Reservation Files).
Page 12	1969:	Park plan showing easements and transfers necessitated by the Southeast/Southwest Freeway (D.C. Land Record No. 612).

RES. N.º 17.



TOTAL AREA OF VARIOUS FEATURES			100,609.06 SQ. FT.
BRIDGES	KIND	NO.	SQ. FT.
HIGHWAY			
FOOT			
CULVERTS			
WALKS AROUND RESERVATION			
KIND	LIN. FT.	WIDTH	SQ. FT.
Concrete	1,640.8	5.65	7640.6
Brick	3281.6	8.27	27142.6
WATERWAYS			
LIN. FT.	WIDTH	SQ. FT.	
STONE WALL	399.01	1.7	678.31
COPING	LIN. FT.	WIDTH	SQ. FT.
Concrete	15.6	1.25	31.86
Concrete	854.27	0.75	643.29
CURB	LIN. FT.	WIDTH	SQ. FT.
Stone			
Concrete			
GUTTERS	LIN. FT.	WIDTH	SQ. FT.
Stone			
Brick			
Concrete			
SPORTS			
Tennis Courts Con.	NO.	SQ. FT.	
Golf Courts	2	650.01	
Baseball Court	1	2,600.01	
Cricket Fields			
Riding Grounds			
Band Stands			
Swimming Pools	2	1,520.01	
Children's Playgrounds	1	23406.01	
Athletic Fields			
Volleyball Courts	1	310.01	
Cricket Courts	1	1,787.51	
Football Fields			
Polo Fields			
Lacrosse Fields			
Picnic Grounds			
Golf Courses			
Bowling Greens			
Dodge Ball Court	1	593.951	
Sand Boxes	2	392.01	
FENCES			
Post & Chain	LIN. FT.		
Pipe Rail	1014.0		
Strand Wire			
Back Stop	328.0		
Ornamental Iron			
Mesh Wire			
Trespass Irons	232.01		
RES. AREA (SQ. FT.) (ACRES)			
405,775.01	9.313		
RES.			
NO. 17			
20-32 (30.0-17)			
Garfield Park			

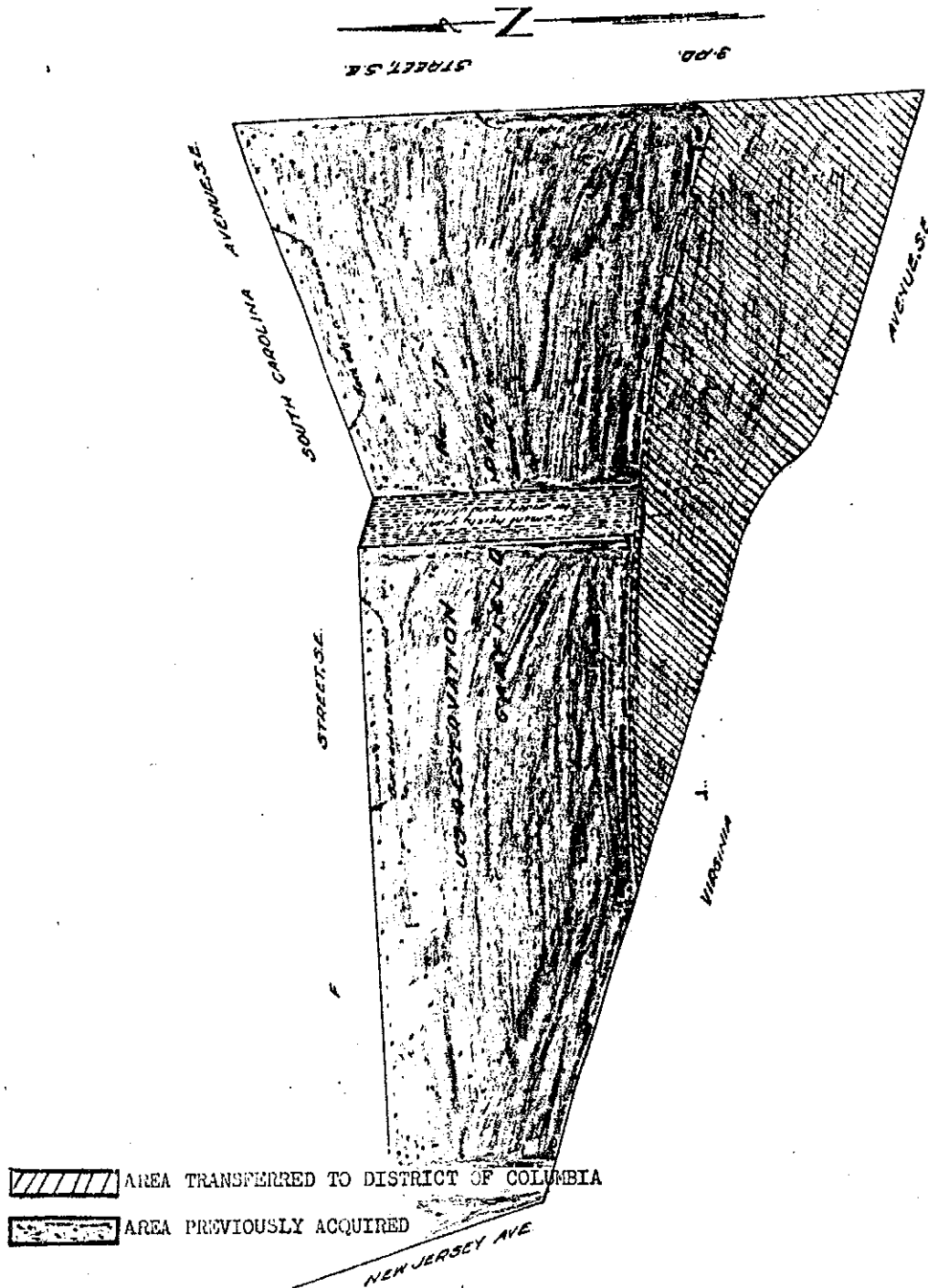
STATUES		HEDGE		TREES		PATHS		ROADS		BUILDINGS	
Kind	Names	Length	Width	Height	No.	Kind	Length	Width	Area (SQ. FT.)	Kind	Length
Shrub Beds		69				Macadam				Foot	
Flower Beds		5				Asphalt				Brick	
Lawn		31				Concrete				Gravel	
Forest Area		17				Macadam				Concrete	
Unimproved A.						Asphalt				Brick	
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RESERVATION NO. 17

GARFIELD PARK

Garfield Park
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LAND RECORD NO. 612